

*ADDRESS TO THE WICUA BIENNIAL CARIBBEAN CONVENTION
AT THE CASCADIA HOTEL, TRINIDAD
BY TTCB PRESIDENT, AZIM BASSARATH
JULY 1ST, 2013*

Thank you Madam Chairman,

President of the WICUA Mr. Cecil Fletcher,
Members of the Executive Committee of the
WICUA, International Umpires and recent
retirees from their exalted positions, senior
umpires, practicing umpires, stakeholders,
supporters, ladies and gentlemen, I want to
extend a warm welcome to Trinidad and
Tobago to all of the foreign delegates
gathered with their local counterparts as
the twin-island republic hosts this historic
biennial umpires convention and
congratulate you on your 50th anniversary.

As you know, cricket umpires are managers
of the game. They are charged with
managing and optimizing the delivery of a

service provided by the players to themselves as professionals, to their fellow players, to umpires, sponsors, spectators and all those who care for the sustenance of West Indian pride.

You provide strong and effective leadership, ensure that standards are maintained by players, in keeping with the laws and spirit of the game, document on a ball-by-ball basis the progress of the game, communicate through oral or hand and foot signals, as the need arises, ensure fairplay and the avoidance of conflict through your body language and knowledgeable and professional conduct, map situations as they arise, process the information and deliver judgment within seconds of the event.

You are indeed supermen and superwomen, who through your diligence, conduct and demeanor can make or break the successful outcome of a game.

I have been honored by your invitation to address you today, particularly as a qualified and former practicing umpire, who can understand your joys and pleasures, trials and tribulations, your struggles for respect, better working conditions, salaries and stipends.

I am confident that the following five days will be filled with excitement as you deliberate on the important matters that concern umpiring in the region.

You will all acknowledge that officials are being challenged in all different ways as the game of cricket changes at lightning pace, bringing with it situations never before seen

or even envisaged some years ago.

Umpires now from the local, national, regional and international levels are being called upon to display their professionalism on and off the field even as increased tournaments compete for your services all over the world

It demands of umpires, the highest standards and I am happy to say that members of your fraternity have showed that they can match their abilities with their colleagues from any part of the world.

But the challenges to regional umpires remain and would more than likely increase in the future with the use of the Decision Review System and the changing rules of the game which allow batsmen and the fielding side reviews of decisions made by

match officials.

Thankfully most of the reviews and DRS decisions go the way of the on-field umpires which shows beyond a doubt that they are fully qualified to take the positions they assume on the field.

I know also that to remain on top of your profession requires constant up-skilling, courses, research on the computer, review of replays on the screen, dialogue with peers, supervisors and match referees review of your on-field and indeed off field performance and behaviour.

You are the most studied professional practitioners by the media, on your on-field decision making, so called experts who will insist that they know the laws of the game but can cite six or seven only.

Spectators sitting at square leg can easily judge lbw and cry "teef, teef" without even knowing the process which you employ in arriving at a decision.

So why do you continue to umpire?

You umpire because you believe in:

- service to community
- desire to help young people in shaping core values of leadership, fair-play, justice, cooperation and shared decision making
- building national pride, passion and legacy which is positive and enduring

- returning to the nation through your service, the values passed on to you by your teachers, gurus, religious leaders and village elders

STAYING ON TOP OF YOUR GAME

You have reached where you are through home and family support, honing your craft through research, hard work, commitment and love for the game. But even the umpiring environment in which you operate can have its ups and down, so how can your performance on the field of play, separate you from your peers on the way to international appointments?

May I suggest that there at least seven characteristics on which you are assessed, and suggest even further, that if you can master all, you can emerge a winner. These are:

1. Your ability to make decisions in a decisive manner through constant training. Mentally mapping and processing situations and utilizing information and knowledge already stored in your brain, to deliver judgment within one or two seconds, are skills which are acquired through hard work and practice.
2. Your display of field craft, technique and mode of communication which are key ingredients of an upwardly mobile umpire.

3. Attitude or style on and off the field of play – your relationship with officials, players, support staff, sponsors and spectators can set you apart from your peers. The umpire is not the star of the game, but every single spectator watches him or her when a decision is made.

4. Display of knowledge and laws of the game, particularly where regulations have to be interpreted which assures the players that you are on top of your craft. Limited overs games are perhaps the most challenging operational environment and constant review of the laws and regulations are compulsory if you are to rise to the top.

5. Fitness and ability to retain good judgment, particularly late in the day. Your first ball and last ball of the day decisions are reflective of your physical ability as much as they are of your mental. Every good umpire trains daily through a dedicated physical programme, checks his fundamentals such as blood pressure, eyesight and hearing and focuses even off season on nutrition health and domestic happiness issues.

6. Ability to use technology and analytical tools. An upwardly mobile umpire has to break any mental barriers he or she may have grown up with and learn to master the computer.

If you can use a phone, change radio or television channels, read a speedometer, take your temperature or use the controls on an electric stove, then you are already on the way to switching on a computer, clicking on applications and reading and seeing match situations, updates on the umpires website, exchanging ideas with colleagues and the range of other skills in the areas of reports, analysis and data processing which are critical to your success.

7. And finally, your personal charm, dress, personal hygiene, etiquette, table manners, communication skills, humility and general deportment which are as important as your performance on the field of play.

ARE YOU PREPARING FOR THE TOP?

Colleagues, friends, Mr. President, not all umpires wish to officiate in regional or international games. Some of us realize that as we age, we are probably losing our opportunity to rise, given the new demands of the ICC, others are in umpiring simply for the joy of serving, others want the flexibility to officiate only from time to time, based on domestic or personal demands, a spouse who may say "its either me or cricket every weekend" or other interests.

But for those who want to rise, I ask the WICUA and the respective territorial umpiring bodies, are you properly preparing your umpires for higher duty? And in turn, I ask the umpires, what are you doing to prepare yourselves?

I wish to propose that:

1. The WICUA must have a Strategic Plan which is relevant, actionable and realistic. I am certain that the West Indies Cricket Board is willing to help you to align yours with theirs, where necessary.
2. WICUA must assist each territorial umpiring body in preparing a similar plan which must be compatible and dovetailed seamlessly into yours and each others.
3. Prepare annual operational plans to implement your strategic plan. For example, if your target each year is to recruit at least ten/twenty new umpires in each territory, what exactly is your plan?

Will you run ads inviting the recruits, will you stimulate interest by having a weekly cartoon in the newspapers, which invites readers to give “out” or “not out” decisions, will you be tackling club members who are no longer playing or former national and international players?

4. Install a vibrant, interactive, up-to-date website where umpires can share experiences and make recommendations to colleagues and umpires.
5. Run a weekly review of the laws on the website, using match situations with a view to sustaining interest but also as a learning tool.

6. Keep up-skilling your umpires who want promotion by exchanges within the Caribbean territories and with Canada and the USA as a start. Have monthly 'tests' on your website which continuously challenges the intellect of the umpires expose them to the latest in computer applications, compel them to do physical tests including strength and conditioning so that they remain alert and mobile, offer advice in personal development and generally increase their technical knowledge and worth to themselves, their families, their communities and to their fellow umpires.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. President, colleagues in umpiring, friends, I gave up umpiring only because of my administrative duties in cricket.

I continue to share your love for the game. But those who are here, unless you constantly challenge yourselves to improve and challenge your leadership to be pro-active, we will fall behind. Some umpires have been rising to the international panel lately and I applaud their success. Others can join them there.

As president of the T&T Cricket Board I want to wish you all the very best in your deliberations over the week and look forward to working with you all in the future to ensure the success of the game in the Caribbean.

I do hope our guests have an enjoyable stay in our beautiful country and sample all that we have to offer and to carry back home memories they will cherish for the rest of their lives.

We also hope that serious decisions will be taken during your convention which will further serve to strengthen the foundation of the game in the region so we can continue to stand out as a beacon at which other countries in the world can look to for inspiration and guidance.

Continue the good work and best wishes for the future.

I thank you.